

Deinstitutionalization: Who's Involved

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Jerome Miller, the nation's leading advocate of deinstitutionalization, is typical of a generation of health service administrators.

"One of the great challenges to our society in the remainder of the 20th Century is to dismantle state government agency by agency, and distribute the responsibility and financial resources to new mechanisms for the organization and delivery of human services.

"The first segments of state government which should be the focus of this long-range dismantling operation are children's and youth services and any institutions which incarcerate as treatment and to protect society."

Jerome Miller, "A Strategy for Youth in Trouble"

Jerome Miller hasn't had the opportunity to dismantle an entire state government yet, but, as commissioner of youth service agencies in two states during a turbulent five years, he has proven a man of his word. Even his harshest critics in Massachusetts and Illinois agree that children's institutions - or what remains of them - will never be the same after Miller's brief terms of office.

A complex mixture of the naive idealist and the manipulative bureaucrat, Miller headed first an agency for delinquent youth in Massachusetts, then a department for all neglected youth in Illinois. He set about dismantling both with equal vigor until circumstances forced his resignations.

But Miller remains undiscouraged in adversity. After all, there are still 48 other states. Wherever he shows up next, he'll begin again the difficult work of closing down homes for juveniles and moving residents into private facilities in the communities.

When the great deinstitutionalizer shows up next, he or she may not be named Jerome Miller. Miller, the nation's leading advocate of deinstitutionalization, is typical of a generation of health service administrators, budget analysts, and social critics. In every community, the Jerome Millers fill the offices of public agencies, arguing for deinstitutionalization and awaiting the moment when a governor or legislature agrees to cut the health budget and begin relocating patients.

Jerome Miller is a true believer. Regrettably, this former seminarian and career Air Force officer has not taken the time to formulate his philosophy in a book or essay. But a coherent view emerges from his outspoken public utterances – large institutions violate human freedom and must be destroyed.

Jerome Miller, The Great Deinstitutionalizer

"We hope to build a system where the client - the child - can walk out the door if he is not happy. He will have the option of other kinds of help."

How to destroy the large institutions? The deinstitutionalizers often ask this question, and Miller has formulated a tentative strategy. In Miller's view, the current system is supported by an establishment of bureaucratic and special interest groups, such as health worker unions and child care lobbies. The real enemy, to Miller, isn't even these entrenched interests as much as the entire concept of "professionalism" in health care, whether in public service or in the traditional charitable agencies.

Quoting social critic Paul Goodman, Miller once declared, "People should have the option to choose a quack." Miller, the theorist, also insists on avoiding trained personnel and on "taking the control of child-care services out of the hands of the professionals, the vendors, and putting in a lot of [? print illegible] input."

Miller, the administrator, would show little sympathy for those who wanted to choose a professional or who maintained that the clients or institutional services include a society that wants protection from juvenile delinquency and effective treatment for its troubled young.

To Jerome Miller, his only clients are the delinquent teenagers or the retarded preschoolers, and these children are the only critics to whom he'll answer. As Miller quotes Aristotle, "The judge of the meal should be the not the chef but the guest."

But Miller the trusting idealist becomes Miller the Machiavellian strategist when it's time to translate theory into practice.

Recognizing the widespread opposition to his goals, Miller declares that "you've got to move fast" in deinstitutionalization in order to get the jump on political adversaries. To do the job of deinstitutionalizing, he relies on for-profit firms which can move without mechanisms of accountability and whose altruism he trusts more than the traditional service agencies. And, once the shutdowns begin and resistance follows, Miller believes that society still benefits because "There'll never be real progress without turmoil." Even if the blitzkrieg against institutions is halted and its architect removed, the turmoil has been "creative chaos," in Miller's view, possible because the disruption of traditional procedures may already be irreversible.

As Miller has said, he didn't intend government service to be a "career job" - at least not in any one state. So far he has marched through two - Massachusetts and Illinois - cutting a Shermanesque path through the states' social service systems.

Jerome Miller came to Massachusetts with every possible advantage. Following a decade of scandals in the state's corrections system, the Legislature in 1969 established a new Department of Youth Services to initiate changes. Gov. Francis Sargent, declaring that "Simply caging

children is not the way of an enlightened society," placed the new agency under the direction of the out-of-state reformer.

But Miller took his game plan with him and proceeded as if he were facing hostile opposition. A "Management Audit of the Department of Youth Services," completed after Miller left by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Post Audit, analyzed Miller's method of operation

How to Destroy the Large Institutions

Instead of restructuring his own department as the Legislature had urged, Miller used federal funds from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to hire people at high salaries to fill new positions. The investigators found this practice "inconsistent with the state classification plan and in conflict with state personnel and civil service regulations."

Policymaking in DYS was shifted to a new "Planning Capability Unit," headed by a \$22,000 consultant and staffed with 22 outside employees hired on a contractual basis using federal funds. This unit made the decisions to close institutions and shift patients to private facilities.

Miller then used the Planning Capability Unit and seven regional offices "not for the purpose of developing alternatives but for the actual implementation of a deinstitutionalization program," according to the audit.

By deinstitutionalization standards, the program was an unqualified success. In less than four years, Miller closed down the state's reform schools, paroled vast numbers of incarcerated youths and shifted others to private custodial facilities -without once receiving the approval of the Legislature.

Critics, however, charged that, in his haste to dismantle the system, the DYS boss came up with an unacceptable method of "deinstitutionalization" - letting juvenile delinquents run away.

According to the legislative audit, when the Industrial School for Boys in Shirley was closed down in 1971, 321 inmates were paroled, 230 were transferred to other facilities, and 318 escaped.

In closing the Lyman School for Boys, Miller paroled home 105 of 169 patients who were removed. Another 11 escaped. An additional 100 residents, were "removed" by sending them to a month-long conference at the University of Massachusetts, where the youngsters were supervised by untrained college students. A tenth of the participants ran away during the \$40,000 project.

Next, attention was turned to what the legislators considered a model facility for youths of elementary school age, the John Augustus Hall School in Oakdale. A three-building complex, with no barred windows or wired glass, the facility contains children's furniture and has no security features. Under Miller's instructions, DYS emptied the institution and experimented with converting it into a detention facility for older youth. During two months in 1972, 28 teenagers escaped.

In its conclusion, the legislative audit noted that Miller "has also bequeathed insufficient maximum security settings for that number of juvenile offenders which the great majority of those dealing with the problem agrees are necessary, a demoralized department, and an ill-supervised private placement program resulting in increased runaways, deaths, and other attendant consequences."

When Miller was hired away by Illinois in April, 1973, one wag called him "the highest paid runaway in history." But, in Illinois Gov. Daniel Walker, Miller had a new boss who seemed to share the cost-cutting views that had made Miller anathema to Massachusetts legislators.

As director of the Illinois State Department of Children and Family Services, Miller became responsible for some 26,000 homeless, neglected, emotionally disturbed, or abused youngsters - 14,500 of them in foster homes or treatment centers. As the cost of living increased 10 per cent from 1973 to 1974, Miller refused to increase the department's appropriations request. Against Miller's wishes, the Legislature added an extra \$5 million to the unit's budget and itemized how it wanted \$40.6 million in the appropriation to be spent.

Miller was outraged.

Ill-supervised Private Placement Program

Pursuing his deinstitutionalization strategy, Miller ordered his staff to cut by a third the number of children in treatment centers and other institutions. Slashing the department's college-trained professional staff from 820 to 700, he began an assault on state institutions. He froze the budget for Angel Guardian, a children's home, paying the center \$10.80 a day for each child although the actual cost was \$22, forcing the facility to close and leaving 200 youngsters without a home. The population of state small group treatment homes was cut from 3,000 to 2,000. Edwards Center, the state's temporary home for dependent youth, was converted into a center for delinquents.

Turning to traditional charitable agencies, Miller reduced the reimbursement rate for caring for dependent children from 100 per cent to 80 or even 50 per cent. At the same time, a new for-profit corporation, Browndale, was reimbursed in full at \$53 a day to care for emotionally

disturbed youngsters -in contrast to the \$15 to \$40 rate set for established agencies such as Lutheran Child and Family Services, Lawrence Hall, and Children's Home of Peoria.

Browndale, a Canadian multi-million-dollar corporation, became a conglomerate in Illinois when it merged with Kaleidoscope, Inc., another for-profit firm which received contracts from Miller to open all-inclusive group homes in Peoria, Champaign, and Bloomington. Browndale president John Brown today visits the far-flung outposts of his child-care empire in the company's \$1 million twin-jet Mitsubishi plane.



Richie Entrusted to Sex Deviates

The most controversial of Miller's programs found youngsters entrusted not to multinational corporations but to flea-bag hotels and, ultimately, even sex deviates and prostitution rings.

The agency paid teen-agers who had been state wards up to \$291 a month to take their own apartments and live on their own. Some 900 youths participated in the program which left many in cheap rooms, vulnerable to unsavory elements in the community.

Under a modified version of the program, "transitional living," children as young as 14 were housed in four Chicago YMCA's, where they received some counseling and tutoring. Some

youngsters ran away, and others were held by police on charges ranging from truancy to prostitution.

The Chicago newspapers discovered one of these children - a 14-year-old boy named Richie.

Richie had been moved into a YMCA as part of the "transitional living" program. Before long, Richie gained a reputation in the neighborhood as the last of the big spenders. Social workers started asking how he could afford to buy gifts for all his friends.

Richie let them in on his secret. He'd been making new friends at the "Y" including several older men who were paying him \$33 a day to pose for pornographic pictures.

As Richie's short, remunerative career ended, Jerome Miller's career also took a turn for the worse. Criticism mounted, and Miller acknowledged that "we had a lot of problems with the 'Y' placements" and that "independent living" was "a lousy program, from top to bottom," with "kids living in flophouses and staying in bed all day."

Miller had become an embarrassment to the Walker administration. The governor waited until several state agency appointments were being announced one August weekend to accept Miller's resignation as head of the Department of Children and Family Services.

"There were indications that Miller didn't know he had resigned until the governor told him," the *Metro East Journal* of East St. Louis reported. He was kept on for a while as a "consultant" to the state, while looking elsewhere for work.

With Illinois and Massachusetts behind him, Miller was reportedly heading for California.

But, to many health planners and public officials across the land, Miller's concepts of deinstitutionalization spelled success, not failure. Even as his Illinois policies became more controversial, Miller addressed symposia on how to make deinstitutionalization work. He propounded his theories, recited his record, and told his followers how to achieve similar records

Excerpted from: *Deinstitutionalization: Out of their Beds and into the Streets*, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, February 1975, pp. 18-22.

Source: *Mental health and the elderly : joint hearing before the Subcommittee on Long-Term Care and the Subcommittee on Health of the Elderly of the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, Ninety-fourth Congress, first session, September 29, 1975*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1976, pp. 111-115 .